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A STATE OF DESPAIR: ROMA (GYPSY) POPULATION DURING TRANSITION

- Transylvanian Case Studies -

Abstract:

This paper tries to assess the present living conditions of a minority that is generally perceived as being to a greater extent “different” to the rest of the population, be that to life-styles, culture or economic strategies. While a general picture of this population is also intended, the paper’s main focus is on poverty and poverty reproduction among some of the rural Roma (Gypsy) people. More precisely, it tries to find what relations could be uncovered between the poverty of a minority group and a certain construction of ethnicity. I assumed that in order to trace this connection a microscopic and detailed research of all the aspects of life of a community is needed. I done such a research between 1999 and 2001 in the village Nusfalău (Sălaj), where I could track the history of two Roma communities from 1850 up to the present. The results of this research, which I’m presenting in this paper, put in comparison a very poor Roma community, whose daily life is pictured in great details, with a rich one, trying to explain how variables like history, mobility, degree of assimilation and traditional work patterns - in connection with different constructions of ethnicity - determine or prevent the state of poverty. One of the most unexpected and puzzling finding of the research is that the more assimilated a rural Roma community is, the greater are the chances to remain poor or even to become extremely poor during transition, and the less assimilated or “traditional” a community stay, the greater are the chances to cope or to enrich during transition.

1. Introduction

Being a part of the comparative project “Poverty, ethnicity and gender during Eastern European Transition”^{*} my ethnographic research is focused on a poor Roma (Gypsy) community from Transylvania (“**Brazilia**”). The hypothesis indented to be tested by the research is that during the transition to the market economy, even if a

^{*} This project was developed between 1999-2001 in six Central and Eastern European countries and was coordinated by Ivan Szelenyi from Yale University and Rebecca Emigh from University of California, Los Angeles. Some of the results are currently under print.

general economic growth is achieved and improvements for the mainstream population become visible, some groups of people with poverty past history might remain trapped in an extreme poverty condition. While during socialism a certain economic homogenization was accomplished, or at least the extreme poor became better-off, in transition the split between classes tends to be re-appropriated. Among the factors that could explain this state of affairs, ethnicity, especially Roma ethnicity, was taken into consideration.

Even if we can hardly speak about economic improvements in the case of the mainstream population of Romania, the village where the researched Roma community is situated (Nusfalau/Nagyfalu) is among those few which benefit in the post-socialist times. For the Roma community, instead, post-socialism is a bitter experience. While during socialism there were also some hard times for them, at least the last fifteen years of that epoch is remembered as a lost dreamland.

During the research another Roma community has come in my attention. Situated in the near-by village the (**Boghis**) Gypsy community is in an opposite situation than Brazilia. They are among the profiteers of the transition times, being in many respects more affluent than an average rural inhabitant of Romania. I thought that this situation is theoretically challenging and I have started to research this community as well. Nevertheless, due to the time constraint, the intensive fieldwork was completed only for Brazilia.

Among the aims of this research an important one is to assess the degree of poverty in the Brazilia community and to check how some indicators that are specific for extreme poverty populations have changed during the transition times (decreasing of life expectancy, increasing of out-of-wedlock births, poverty illnesses, etc). By its large descriptive part, deployed over three historical periods (pre-socialism, socialism, post-socialism), the paper tries to put into light the differences and the resemblances of the Roms living standards during different times.

The question of the role played by ethnicity in poverty reproduction has tried to be answered by the comparison of the poor Roma community with a wealthy one. More precisely, the intention of the paper is to show the factors that in combination with ethnicity maintain or produce poverty. Among the found factors the most important seems to be the following: the long history of social segregation of the ethnic group; the integration of the group in the periphery of the economic system of the village; the preservation of a strong ethnic borders between the Roma group and the non-Roma populations; the weak economic mobility; the strength of the taken for granted patterns of behavior that are involved in the day-to-day social interactions between the majority and the Roma minority; the degree of cultural assimilation.

One of the (unexpected) findings of this research is that the Roms of Brazilia are poor not simply because they are “Gypsy”, but because they are not “enough Gypsy”. They internalized the meaning of their ethnicity that is constructed by the majority population, one that by definition assigns to the gypsy the lowest position. They are not proud of their ethnicity, like in the case of the Boghis Roms, and because of their early integration at the periphery of the village they forgot the “gypsy way”, the way that makes the success of the Boghis community.

2. Broader context: general presentation of the Roma population of Romania

It is well known that among the Central and Eastern European Countries Romania has the largest population of Roma: according to 1992 census (self-identification) Roma represent 1,8% of the population (401 087). The study of Metro Media Transylvania raises the percent to 3,6 (815 000), while the study of C&E Zamfir (1993) raises even further to 4,3-4,6% (1 000 000-1 010 646). According to these data Roma represent the second minority in Romania after Hungarians (7,1%).

When comes to poverty (those who have below 60% of average expenses for living) we find that Roma represent 62% (629 000) from the whole poor population. It is very likely, therefore, that Roma represent also the greatest population which live in extreme poverty. However, because of the great diversity of Roma in Romania, it is very difficult to find a single pattern of extreme poverty emergence: we find poor Roma in the big cities and in rural areas, poor among the “traditional” groups and among “assimilated” Roma. While very rich Roma also exist, as well as not-so-poor and not-so-rich Roma, we may presume that after 1989 different groups of Roma have exploited (or were forbidden to) differently the new opportunities according to their peculiar socialist background, their social and cultural (in)dependence and their skills to manage in the new economic environment. As a consequence of the systemic shift that have begun in 1989 the historically poor Roma population as well as the not-so-poor Roma tend to become poorer and poorer after every “reform” step to capitalism. In the condition in which the majority population becomes also poorer, a population that was historically perceived as “alien” is constantly and continuously marginalized and ghettoized.

2a. Classifications

Before socialism there were several attempts to classify the Roma population in order to find a solution to “the Gypsy problem”. A general classification was made according to the criterion of occupation: “aurari”(gold seekers), “rudari” (woodworkers), “ursari” (bear trainers), “caldararii”, “spoitarii” (vessel makers), “lautari” (musicians), “ciurari” (sieve and brush makers), “fierarii” (metal workers). A different classification was made by the criterion of mobility: “laesii”, “netotii”, “gurbetii” were nomadic groups, while “rudarii”(“baesii” in Transilvania, “lingurarii” in Moldova) and “vatrasii” being considered sedentary groups. Within the group of enslaved Roma there was a differentiation according to their master: “domnesti” (prince’s gypsy), “manastiresti” (belonging to the monasteries) and “boieresti” (boyars’ gypsy). Among the occupation of the Roma populations the most common accounted are marginal or complementary to the mainstream economy: different types of “entertainment”, metalwork, producing small wooden objects for domestic use, baskets, brushes, bone objects, bricks, some small

agriculture tools. They were also musicians, masons, shepherds (only for pigs herds), wild fruits gatherers, flowers sellers, bells craftsmen.

As in the case of other European countries some classifications (especially by the mobility criterion) were aimed to divide between those who can be subjects of “assimilation” and those who – in the racial perspective that culminated before WW II – should be isolated or deported. In Romania the taxonomy was aimed to separate the “useful” Roma (that was a small number of metalworkers at the countryside and handicraftsmen in the cities, plus some musicians) from the “beggars”, “vagrants”, and “primitive” Roma who, by their high rate of reproduction, would alter the “pure” composition of the Romanian population (Ion Chelcea, 1940). The consequence of this classification was the massive deportation of Roma populations in Transnistria (eastern Basarabia, now part of Republic of Moldova) during the war.

2b. Slavery

A particular situation of the Romania’s Roma populations is determined by their long history of enslavement. The history of the slavery can be traced to the year 1445 when the Prince Vlad Dracul captured in a fight in Bulgaria twelve thousand “Egyptians”, and took them to Wallachia. 1471 is the year when the same thing happened in Moldova: the prince Stefan the Great transported here seventeen thousands Gypsies from Wallachia. While in Transylvania there were also (*de facto*) gypsy slaves, only in Moldavia and Wallachia the slavery was an institution which functioned within a legal framework. The beginning of the slavery in these countries is not very clear. There are references concerning slavery previous to the above-mentioned events. There was a familiar custom among princes to donate gypsy communities as gifts to monasteries or boyars. Mircea the Old (Wallachia), for example, donated in 1385 three hundred families to the Cozia monastery. One of the explanations for the slavery of Gypsy sustains that they were already slaves when they came in Moldova and Muntenia following their Tatar warrior masters. When the Tatar lost a battle the slaves Gypsies were used in the same condition by the local aristocrats (G. Potra, 1939). During history the economy of these countries tended to rely more and more on slave labor; therefore their values increase and they were “imported” from the neighboring regions. This could be an explanation for the big number of Roma in present Romania. As Isabel Fonseca has shown, from the moment they were imported en masse, the prejudice against them was sealed. “The term Gypsy no longer signified a broad ethnic group or race...For the first time it referred collectively to a social class: the slave cast.” (Fonseca, 1995, p.179) The issue of the “gypsiness” of these populations raised an important question, which bothered a lot the Romanian classificatory systems: are the “rudari” and “vatrasi” (who didn’t speak Romani) “real” gypsy? More probably many of these populations were just slaves, but considered as gypsies because gypsies could be enslaved. The origin of (at least some) Romanian gypsies might be therefore better explained by using a hypothesis similar to the “indigenous” hypothesis that was supposed for the case of Great Britain (Oakely, 1983) than by obscure migration or descendant theories. Probably because of the slavery system and the continuous need for the slave labor, heterogeneous populations drop historically under the category of “Gypsy”, being historically marginalized and discriminated up to nowadays. Those who were categorized as “Gypsy” remained because of slavery very

high isolated groups. Different laws that banned marriages with “Gypsies” functioned until XIX century both in Moldova and in Vallachia. According to them, whoever (man or women) married a Gypsy would be enslaved. The slavery was abolished completely in 1856 by the ruler of the new-created modern state, A.I. Cuza.

A certain form of Roma slavery was used in Transylvania also. Here, because of their precious skills as metalworkers, musicians and gold-seekers, they were considered serves of the king. With King’s agreement Roma were settled down and collectively used as labor force by the privileged (German or Hungarian) city-dwellers of the royal towns. This form of serfdom was abolished in 1848 (Fraser, 1992).

2c. Romanian Roma during socialism

After the WW II Romania has lost the provinces Basarabia and Bucovina. The population of nomadic Roma, which was especially subject of deportation in Basarabia, has not came back entirely. Consequently, the nomadic Roma populations decreased in Romania after 1948. While before war an average Roma camp (“Şatra”) was formed by fifteen-seventeen carts, after 1950 a camp of seven or eight carts was rare. The socialist politics concerning Roma had two tasks: settle down the nomadic populations and integration by assimilation. For Roma socialism was a period of important economic and social improvements, but in the same time it was a time of denying their ethnic and cultural specificity. On the base of the socialist principle of complete employ of the labor forces the Roma were enforced to have a job in the socialist economy. Nevertheless, this strategy succeeded mostly in the case of men, the overwhelming number of women remaining unemployed. They were also enforced to send their children to school, but they were taught in majority’s language and no kind of special advantageous conditions were made for them (in contrast with Hungarians and Germans). An important achievement was the fact that Roma were held in the socialist sanitary “safety net”, even if the prejudices of the sanitary personnel against them remained strong (even now in Romania there are physicians who are speaking about “gypsy diseases”, thinking about genetic characteristics that are “specific to their race”). As a consequence of this state’s concern, the level of the infant mortality and of the poverty diseases decreased strongly.

Because of industrialization many traditional occupations of the Roma disappeared. The fact had important consequences in respect with their traditional way of life, especially for the urban (or urbanized) Roma. Very often they renounced to their traditional clothes, domestic taboos and even, sometime, to their traditional hierarchical division between genders. In the new-built socialist block of flats districts they were mingled with police and army personnel, in an attempt to be both controlled and “civilized” by them. What they have never lost were their strong connections within the enlarged families or clans and their proclivity towards doing other marginal economic activities. Even if they begun to look and generally to act very similar to the non-Roma, the public conscience retained the memory of their “gypsiness”, which was amplified as a stronger ethnic difference after the fall of the socialism.

However, “socialism” was not a homogenous period. The economic difficulties of Romania’s last decade of socialism stopped the process of modernizing the Roma population. Many of them entered in a de facto unemployment, which turned them again

towards traditional activities, in the new context. In the economic environment characterized by the widespread scarcity of basic products, the hidden economy aggrandized. Some Roma found in this hidden economy a niche that was less exploited by the majority: they made trade with very high scarce goods - the illegal imported products - a trade which supposed a high level of risk-taking: contraceptive pills, blue jeans, cigarettes, coffee, western electronic devices, foreign currency. While they were not the only social group who made such trade, they were doing it on open spaces, being in that way more visible than others and, consequently, being more easily punished by the police. Entire Roma families were jailed and their children were institutionalized in the "famous" orphanages, which in the last years of Ceausescu's regime looked more and more like extermination camps.

What is important to be mentioned is the fact that even if some Roma maintained their jobs in formal economy until 1989 they were generally unskilled workers, doing works that were seen as polluting or no-worthy by the majority.

2d. After 1989

I would describe the Roma situation after the fall of socialism following two dimensions: social-economical and political.

2d1. Social-economical status

The changes of the system that have begun in 1989 affected Roma in exceptional way. Because of low level of education and low professional skills they were among the first who lost their jobs. A small minority of the Roma has taken advantage of the new opportunities: working or begging in western countries, bringing at home merchandises from the neighboring markets (Turkey, former Yugoslavia), making deals with western old cars, selling Romanian and Hungarian antiquary in West, providing from the black market whatever goods were scarce. But the great majority of the Roma population has entered in a deep crisis. Much to suffer have especially the half-assimilated Roma from the cities, who because unemployment and uprooting have lost both the modern and the traditional strategies for living, and the rural Roma, who - because they were not given land during re-privatization - have dropped once again in the situation of being totally deprived of resources.

The attitudes of the majority towards Roma have changed also dramatically. All the prejudices and stereotypes of the majority against Roma, which were more or less hidden or dissembled during socialism, have come into open. In the cities these prejudices take the explicit forms of not employing a person in the new emerging private sector of economy if he/she is (or considered) Roma. In the public institutions Roma are regarded with contempt and are subject to all kind of power abuses (in justice, education, sanitary system etc). Being forced to find a living solution, some Roma intermediate on the market of agricultural products between the peasants and the city-customs. They are perceived by the city-dwellers as "speculanti" (racketeers), who artificially determine the prices' raising, fact that enhances the hatred against Roma. They were constantly harassed by the police (with a large consent of the majority of the non-Roma population) and forced to develop highly hidden illegal activities (drug-dealers, weapons sellers etc) or to fall to the bottom of society, doing desperate surviving activities (begging, stealing,

prostituting or exploiting the residual objects) and thus to reinforce the stereotypes against them (“it is ‘natural’ for gypsy to steal, to beg, to deceive” etc). Whenever the state (which is perceived by many as loosing its authority) wants to reinforce its image, the most common strategy is to organize police raids in Roma districts. These raids, very strongly reflected in the media, shows squads of police which look like anti-terrorist teams forcing during night Roma houses and brutally beating the arrested persons in front of the cameras. Such behavior would be inconceivable in the case of persons belonging to majority, fact that proves the level of public hatred and chauvinism against Roma.

In the rural areas the situation is even worse. During socialism a part of the Roma population was held in the socialist farms; all the members of these farms received (besides salary) also small plots for their private use (Kideckel, 1991). Consequently, the rural Roma were guaranteed a minimum resource for surviving. In addition, they were stealing from the farms (along with a majority who was stealing with the same enthusiasm) different kind of goods for their domestic use or for selling them on the black market. After the dissolution of the farms they have not received land during re-privatization, even if the ex-employed were entitled to on the basis of the law 18/1990. The law stipulates that a person who was working continuously for a period of three years in the socialist farm could receive land (if there is enough) even if he/she hadn't had land in possession before collectivization. Of course the land was never “enough” and the Roma inhabitants were not helped to fill in the application forms for entitlement. Remaining without any kind of resources, Roma are forced to re-appropriate some of their traditional activities and crafts, but those are never sufficient for living in the new economic context. They continue to steal, but this time from plots of land that are private properties of the peasants. The Roma communities (which generally remained geographically segregated during socialism) have fallen in deep poverty and are perceived by the majority as “shameful” and “good for nothing”. Wherever a conflict between a member of the majority and a Roma became open, the majority has a propensity to transform it in a conflict between communities, between “us” – the “civilized”, “working-people” and indigenous – and “them” – “barbarous”, “lazy” and “alien”. In some cases Roma have succeeded to exploit successfully a new opportunity; their richness was perceived as impertinence and (even if the procedure for making money was based on work) as a result of theft. Not long after 1989 the new-emerged conflicts (combined with older conflicts, repressed during socialism or produced because of socialist social organization) exploded in violent ethnic clashes. The scenarios of these clashes were very similar: after a crime performed by a Roma against a non-Roma, the majority mob burned during nights the Roma houses. Hundreds of Roma remained homeless, were injured or even killed in villages or towns from all over the country: Reghin (1990), Lunga (1990), Satu-Mare (1990), Seica Mare (1990), Huedin (1990), Calnic (1990), Cuza-Voda (1990), Kogalniceanu (1990), Plaesii de Sus (1991), Hadareni (1993), etc. The national television presented the conflicts as “responses of the majority to the provocations of Gypsy thieves” (Fonseca, 1995).

2d2.Politics of identity

After 1989 Roma elites have begun to use the democratic liberties in order to establish a new social position for their ethnic group. The strategies are various:

- a. Liberal-democratic: creating political parties, non-governmental organizations, cultural associations, charitable societies
- b. Religious: emancipating the “wild” Roma by converting them to neo-protestant denominations
- c. Romantic nationalism: unifying the ethnic group around a “Roma king” (Cioabă Ion) or “Roma emperor” (Rădulescu Iulian)

The term “rrom” (Roma) was publicly proposed in order to replace the highly pejorative term “țigani”.

Some Roms who reached position in political or administrative apparatus (parliament, ministers, local councils) become well known for the “public eye”, being able to influence the public opinion. Unfortunately those who are speaking for the Roma (being themselves Roma or only “Roma by profession”) are very often used by the majority parties to fight one against the other for minor political privileges. Consequently, no kind of important reforms concerning Roma were made in the direction of cultural rights for the ethnic group or structural economic measures aimed for those Roma who are in deep poverty.

Another big problem for Roma emancipating movement is the distance between the elite and the mass of Roma population. Because of the low level of education of the deprived mass of Roma the elite speaks a language totally senseless for their people. Accordingly, the elite is compelled to fight on two directions: to convince the majority about their rights to difference and to specific political, social and economic concerns, on one side, and to convince their people about the appropriateness of their actions, on the other side (in the conditions in which many Roma believe that to deal with *Gadjo** is useless).

In this moment the movement becomes stronger day after day but remains divided as always in numberless fractions and parties, each with its discourse, interests, ambitions and goals.

3. The communities: Brazilia and Boghis. Historical demographic perspective. Socialist period

Location

Both communities are disposed in Nusfalau (Nagyfalu) a commune situated in N-W part of Transylvania, not very far from the Hungarian border (60 km). The closest big cities are Zalau, at 32 km E (the capital of the Salaj county) and Oradea at 78 km S-W (the capital of the Bihor county). The commune (which in Romania represents the smallest administrative unit) is formed by four villages: Nusfalau, Boghis, Bilghiz and Bozies). The first Roma community, and the one that captured my main interest during

* *Gadjo*, *Gadze* are terms involved by the Roms to designate all those who are not belonging to the Roma groups.

the fieldwork, is called “Brazilia” (Brazil) and is a part of the Nusfalau village (the center of the commune and the place where the mayoralty, local council and other institution are disposed). The second is situated in the near-by village, Boghis, located at four km far from Nusfalau.

From the ethnic point of view the area is dominated by the Hungarians. At the last census (1992) from the total of 5738 inhabitants of the commune 4412 were Hungarians, 654 Roma, 645 Romanians, 22 Slovaks, 3 Germans, 1 Serb and 1 Jew.

3A. The Roms of Nusfalau

3Aa. Brazilia

134 families (542 people) live in Brazilia in 75 dwellings. The Roma district is situated at the Eastern end of the village, far (and invisible) from the national road. The district is composed by two streets inhabited exclusively by Roma families and is clearly delimited by a no-man’s-land strip from the rest of the village. The Roms of Brazilia belongs to the Roma branch of brick-makers, a craft that is genuinely preserved and practiced today like 100 years ago. This kind of activity, which in the past supposed a certain degree of nomadism, have structured their community lives and determined their status. Around this defining activity they developed during time different life-styles, struggling always to maintain it and to transmit the craft to their children as the most reliable and certain coping strategy.

Historically poor, the Roms of Brazilia endure today the worst economic situation after WWII. After the collapse of socialism (and especially after 1995, when the “capitalist” reforms felt their consequences in rural Romania) they fall day after day in the position of the “pariah”, loosing all the previous gains. They are living today at the energetic level (working – when there is something, anything - for surviving) with almost no chances for improvement.

Historical-demographic perspective

We have data about the presence of the Roms in Nusfalau beginning with 1820. 3 Roms appear in the tax registers at that year. Small variations occur in the next decade (1825: 6; 1831:4). A more important group was witnessed beginning with 1835: 33. Nevertheless, the community had not grown significantly in the first half of the XIXth century (1840: 28; 1848:36). In 1850 33 Roms inhabited the village. They disappeared from the next census (1880), but we may suppose they were counted to the rubric “Hungarian speakers” (in the logic of the assimilation politics of the time and if supposing the Roms had the same language abilities as today). Nevertheless, 46 people were counted on the rubric “unknown language”: they might have been Roms. According to a local historian (Major Miklos) an important group of Roms came in the village sometime in the last two decade of the XIX allured by the economic boom of the village (the village became an important market-place, having the right to organize 6 yearly

markets; above this, a significant group of Jews (119 in 1850; 146 in 1880; 242 in 1900) opened the way to capitalist organization of work; a railway was opened in 1899, etc). Probably because of their traveling customs they were not considered “insiders” – this could be the reason why no Gypsy was counted in the 1900 census. In 1930, 161 Roms were witnessed in the village but, strangely, only 114 Romani speakers. After the war an important decreasing in number of the Roms was reckoned at the level of the commune: from the total of 237 in 1941 only 55 were counted in the 1956 census (in Boghis and Nusfalau; the other two villages of the commune has never had Roma population). This decreasing is a consequence of the large dislocation of Roms population during the war. But from 1956 on, the Roms demographic data were in continuous increasing: from 212 in 1966 and 313 in 1977 up to 654 in the present.

The memory of the village has preserved the fact that in the XIXth century the Roms from Nusfalau used to be, as elsewhere in Transylvania, serfs of the local aristocrat. Here they were “employed” by the baron Banffy as brick-makers (the great majority) especially for his personal needs (an informant shown me the bricks of one of the baron’s preserved palace, which function today as orphanage, and explain me the production technique that is still in use) and as stable men at its horses. Some of them were employed as land-workers on his domains as well. A band of musicians was also witnessed in the community (bricks-making and music are the two traditional skills that have remained constant to nowadays). The Roms lived on the baron lands, a situation that has been maintained haphazardly up to these days (see chapter “Housing”).

Some remarks about the social position of the Roms in Transylvania should be added here.

In the multiethnic picture of Transylvania’s population the Gypsy have ever had the lowest status and prestige. Deprived of what it is seen, both by Hungarian and Romanians, the most valuable good – the land – they were at the mercy of the landlords who employed them for various temporary works. Only a minority of skilled workers was respected – and those were seen more like exceptional individuals who overcame their ethnic condition. The great majority of them were compelled to live a semi-vagrant life, being incessantly in searching of a new opportunity for surviving. They traveled around a restricted area, always coming and going from and to a precarious “home”, providing petty domestic objects and services for the peasants. During these travels different groups met each other (on an aristocrat domain, in the regional markets etc) and continuously mixed through marriages or in-common employment. That could be the reason why very different groups, in what concern their traditional way of life and skills division, share up to the present very similar linguistic patterns (if compare with the more exclusive groups of Hungary, for example). Nevertheless, the Transylvanian’s Gypsies had a certain “political” pre-eminence if compared with the Gypsies from Moldavia and Vallachia. The later were subject to a unified system of laws, which established very clearly their status as slaves (“robi” – the meaning of the word preserved for long time the identity of the “robi” with “tigani”), being “objects” that could be treated as “commodity”: they were sold, inherited and exchanged with objects until the middle of the last century. Representing also the lowest social stratum, the Transylvanian Gypsies were subject “only” to the arbitrariness of aristocrats and local councils who, by their decisions, very often maintained the Gypsies in the position of “communities’ goods”. As was proved by

the empress Maria Theresa and Josef II in the XVIIIth century the only one solution conceivable for the “Gypsy problem” was considered to be forced assimilation. Contrary to their “enlightened” intentions for the Roms emancipation, their reforms opened the way for endlessly manipulation of the Gypsies by the imperial authorities and nobility. Being kept in a position of serfs – even if the Roms were not de facto slaves – they had for a long time the economic status of the slaves (no property: land, houses; no civil rights; no education), a status that affect for long their position and mentality and could stay as historical reason for their present situation.

When not employed by the baron, or later by the Hungarian landlords, the Roms from Nusfalau (not always counted as Nusfalau’s “insiders”, but as groups at the mercy of the aristocrat’s will, who had domains along several villages) traveled around in searching for demands and for good row material for their bricks production.

A small number of them gained certain respectability at the beginning of the XXth century as craftsmen: in 1921 two Gypsy were independent aluminum metalworkers; seven blacksmiths were also counted: they probably were also Roms.

What is important to be underlined in the case of the Roms from Nusfalau beginning with the start of the century is the fact that due to the prosperity of the area they found a lot of opportunities for employment around the *gadze* economic activities. Being intimate to the economic system they were determined to renounce in a certain degree to their cultural closeness, being subjects to a process of slow assimilation. They abandon very early their traditional dress-style and some of the customary taboos and social rules. Nevertheless, the process has never been decisively; their social mobility outside their ethnic group was very limited during time. The preservation of the language is a proof of the strong limitation imposed by the majority in what concerns the endeavors of the Roms to overcome the ethnic borders. I’m speaking about “overcoming of the ethnic borders” because the tendency of “escaping” of their ethnicity seems to be a constant for the Roms who are caught within processes of assimilation or modernization. And this is determined by the fact that in the case of the Roms from Romania the ethnic label (“tigani”, “ciganiok”) has always functioned as a class distinction (Emmanuelle Pons, 1995). The term and its derivatives signify in the *gadze* expressions all that is considered low, shameless, lawless. In Nusfalau it seems to me that whatever habits the Roms had assimilated from the majority during different period of time they would be always condemned to a low status because of the strong ethnic distinctions (more about this below). The process of acculturation was determined, as I already suggested, by the early Roms integration in the formal economy of the area. In 1900 a bricks factory was opened in the village by the Jewish community, where the Gypsy (many women among them!) were employed at the hardest works. In 1930 the factory (Papp-Sweiger) enlarged its productive capacities and produced mainly for export. Independent Roms continued to produce bricks as well for local needs. The agriculture – thanks to the good quality land - was also in expansion. The improvement of the roads and the building of the railway facilitated the trade of the agriculture products. Because of the market opportunities the landlords replaced the previous crops cultures with vegetables cultures, which were more profitable in the new context. But the growing of vegetables required also a greater labor force: the Roms found here another opportunity. But “opportunities” should be read here

only as “surviving chances”. In whatever activity they were involved around the non-Romaeconomy the Roms were considered to be a cheap labor force that have no right to raise claims for payment similar with a gadzo worker. Accordingly, before the WWII, an important number of Roms were employed only for food and clothes by the Hungarians, during the periods of intense work on the plots. Some of them, especially women, were employed also for domestic works, around the Hungarian households. Because the Gypsy had no land, they were constrained to do whatever was offered to them by the majority population. Lacking the land was the cause why they couldn't center their economic life on their hands in the style that majority population did. Having no possibility to produce fodder they couldn't breed cattle and different animal products and therefore they were strongly dependent in what concern the food by the majority's working force needs. When employed in the agriculture or domestic works the great majority of Roms had in fact a serf status.

In conclusion, until the WWII the Roms from Nusfalau were in the process of continuous integration in the formal economy: we found them as independent craftsmen, employees in the industry, agricol workers. However, if we may speak about economic integration (or maybe more accurate about “a strong dependency”), we may hardly speak about equality with other ethnic groups: their lack of property (of land, as in the case of Hungarians and Romanians; of capital, as in the case of Jews) condemned them to an inferior social status impossible to be overcome.

Socialist period

In 1950 the process of organizing the economy of the village in socialist style starts. A collective of peasants (CAP or agricultural productive cooperative) was set up - under the name “New Life”/”Uj Elet” - by forcing 98 families to put together their pieces of land (300 Ha). The land of the local aristocrat (who was forced to leave the village) was nationalized (his domains were continuous sources of land by previous land reforms of the new Romanian administrations of Transylvania: in 1921 as well as in 1945). The collectivization was finished in 1962 when the farm reached the extent of 3100 Ha. At the beginning of the '80s a socialist farm for cattle breeding (capacity: 5000 heads) was raised, taking almost a half of the collective land. An independent socialist enterprise (SMA) providing machines for agriculture was also built in order to serve the CAP. The bricks factory was nationalized and modernized during time. In 1962 the village was electrified (with the exception of the Brazilia colony!) and the main road was paved.

The community of Roms was decisively divided during socialism following a path that was sketched before the war.

In the XIXth century the community of Gypsies was located at the Western end of the village (their cemetery is still in that area). Around the turn of the century they were moved on the Southern end. After the war and during the land reform the baron was forced to allocate to “the poorest people” parcel of land for house building. Among the poorest Romanians and Hungarians six Roms families received land in a place called “Bakos” situated at the North Eastern end of the village. Is not very clear which were the criteria for choosing only those families, but we may suppose they were still “at the mercy of the baron's will” or, with other words, still in the service of the aristocrat at that

time (more probable as stablemen and craftsmen). When came in power the communists decided, after the nationalization of the baron's land, to move the rest of the Roms (and most important in number) on a former baron's place, known as "Brazilia" and situated at the Eastern end of the village. The district Brazilia was developed as a housing area after the first WW, being lived by around twenty families of average Hungarians. The intention of the communists was declared as "hygienic" and "civilizing". Nevertheless, no conditions (social houses, sewerage, wells) were provided. Known as bricks-makers, the Roms were supposed to manage themselves in raising a district following the "precious advices" of the authorities. In fact, the moving decision was but a strategy of the communist for a more tightly control of the Roms. Few families - already established on a place not far from Bakos but outside the village (a place called today the "Tori colony") - escaped the enforced relocation.

The part of Brazilia where the Roms live is not exactly "in the village" but more in an in-between area limited in three directions by cultivated parcels and in the forth direction (at a certain distance) by poor Romanians and Hungarians houses. (I'll refer from now on to "Brazilia" to name the Gypsy community, as the villagers themselves do.)

During socialism the Brazilia's Roms never considered this housing-place in the same fashion as the majority population. The great majority of them lived for all this period a semi-nomadic life: in the period 1950-1980 they traveled (with the entire families) during spring and summer all over the country in searching demands for their bricks or for other chances to make a living. They came back for the winter, but not regularly: they could establish themselves for two or three years in a different place and came back in Brazilia only when exhausting the founded opportunities. Many of them hanged around a village until they finished the commands of the peasants for their cheap bricks or until they terminated the needed raw material (a special kind of clay). Some of them settled down for a while in the cities and received low-paid jobs in heavy industries (cement, glass, chemical factories) all over the country. But even those took this strategy as a temporary solution. When they found an easier way to cope with daily life they abandoned the town and went somewhere else. In the same time Brazilia was a place where other Roms found a temporary place in their travels. Due to this lifestyle they were condemned to a continuous marginalization: the level of education was very low (many of them remained illiterate), they never acquire a family patrimony to be transmitted from one generation to another, they were not trained in modern professions. Some of them were not even registered in the civil books and had no kind of identity cards (During my stay in Nusfalau a Roma woman couldn't leave the maternity hospital because her mother couldn't remember where she was born – a data required for registering the child). The semi-nomadic life determined also the housing conditions and the structure of the Brazilia colony. The houses were built by them, using their bricks and generally were very small (one or two rooms with an average dimensions of 4x4 m). A dwelling had no more than two small windows, was not uncommon to be covered with rush and had no additional dependencies. They have no kind of courtyards around the houses; once one exits the house he/she enters in a shared public space. Three lines of houses were divided by two unpaved roads (dusty in summer, muddy in winter). From place to place there were big wholes in the ground (old places of exploitation for the bricks production), which, by time - and because of rains - turned into swamps. The houses that would not be

inhabited two or three years ruined. Some new comers could rebuild them with disregard for the former owners (if they were permitted by the leader). (see more about this on “Housing”)

The semi-nomadic life of the Brazilia’s Roms continued in the next period (1980-1989) and shortly after 1989 but in a different way. Beginning with 1980 the communist regime turn back to a very restrictive government almost similar to the Stalinist-influenced regime of the 50’s. The social control deepened and the consequences of an aberrant industrialization and massive rural-urban migration came to light. Many socialist farms had lost during time the working force and when the time of intensive works on the cultivated lands came different social categories of people from the towns were forcibly token to the farms (students, soldiers, schoolchildren with their teachers etc). In this context the Roms from Brazilia were employed in groups as temporary workers in the big socialist farms of the Oradea and Bihor counties. They went from Brazilia in March and came back in November. As in the previous period they moved with the whole family. At the farms they were provided common dormitories and they were offered daily meals at special canteens. This situation seemed to be profitable (a compromise) both for the Roms and for their employers. The Roms succeeded to perpetuate their semi-nomadic life-style, feeling themselves independent for the part of the year when were not employed, while the communists used them as a cheap labor force and (imagined) they had a tighter control of the Roms. At the end of the working-period the Roms were paid in nature. In this way they were ensured with the needing food supplies for the winter and very often they had a surplus of grains that was sold (illegally, and with great satisfaction) with good money in the town-markets or to the Nusfalau’s peasants (a variation of the Roms’ cultural motif of making “easy money”, as they understand it; see M. Stewart, 1997). Their economic situation was strongly improved compared with the previous period. Nevertheless, this money-gaining opportunity was not transformed in patrimony (land, houses). “*We were fools at that time*”- a Rom remembers. “*We spent everything on drink and games, without concern for the future*” (V.G., 58). The above-described situation had the following consequences:

1. Considering the Roms as being temporary inhabitants the local authorities made no efforts to improve their living conditions in the village. Brazilia remained as undeveloped as in the previous period. The Roms were not provided a minimum of living standards. No house was endowed with electricity until 1989. In fact the authorities always hoped that the Gypsies would not come back. They made even efforts to drive them away, harassing them in all the possible ways. An often used strategy was to chastised them on the basis of the law 150/1970 which stipulated punishment with jail for “social parasitism, anarchism and abnormal behavior” (in the case of the Roms their lack of regular jobs; in socialist Romania to have a regular job was a duty stipulated by law). Police troops were sent in Brazilia to arrest all the men able to work. The arrested persons were put in jails for up to six months. Those who escaped the police raids hid in the forests for weeks (during winter!). Another strategy was to “disinfest” them: once again with the help of the police they were gathered, undress in the open spaces and sprinkled with chemical substances.

From the interviews: *“The Militieni [Police troops] used to come early in the morning with dogs and firearms. They surround the district and some entered in the houses. Everyone tried to escape how he could. When caught the Roms were taken by hair and were beaten. Many were afraid of jail; they went in the forests and stay there until the spring. The children carried food to them. Many were put in jail, be guilty or not.”* (K.V., 38, Brazilia)

2. At the farms they were also considered temporary working force. Accordingly, very few were employed in the form of full time job (a form that enable them later to have pensions). They had a much better life here than at home (now they remember the epoch as the happiest in their lives), but they were not treated in those villages as worthy-to-bothered inhabitants. Consequently, the teachers, for example, were not preoccupied for the Roms’ children education. The same was true in regard with their health condition.

From the interviews: *“During Ceausescu’s time there were good places to work. We were provided with work at the farms; we gained 5000 lei [around 200 USD] and food – we brought potatoes, bean, cereals; we had enough food to breed some pigs”* (L.O., 48, Brazilia)

3Ab. Bakos

A much different history during socialism had the Roms that lived in the North Eastern part of the village, in a place called “Bakos”. Even if situated at a limit of the village they could be considered as living more “inside” the village if compared with Brazilia’s Roms. The housing area is a mixed Hungarian-Romanian-Roma district, a situation that affected the Roms living habits. The roads are paved and all the houses have electricity. Even if poorest than Hungarians and Romanians the Rom’s households have enclosed courtyards. More willingly of integration and also constrained by their vicinity with the majority’s household they had different opportunities than the Brazilians. Their long-term past played probably also a role in their different status: the fact they were employed by the baron or their former formation as craftsmen made them more stabile. At least this has to be true for the core families that were moved in the area in 1945. During time (and because the strong adversity in the village for the mixed marriages) some Roms from Brazilia succeeded to move here. The community counts today 28 households.

During socialism they were proletarianized, being employed mainly in the local industry and agriculture. The bricks factory and the local socialist farm were the main available working places. Because the farm was conceived in the form of “people’s enterprise” (CAP) a part of the land was worked in common by all the members of the farm, while another part was divided between the families which were compelled to give a share of the production for the collective accumulation. The Roms received the worst lots, but

even such their life improved to a great extent. Some were employed as commuters at some oil and coal exploitation enterprises (Suplacu de Barcau, Ip). What is decisive in their case is that they had reliable regular jobs that permitted them to live like the rest of the population. Influenced by the majority they transform the money gaining opportunities in source for patrimony accumulation and entered in a race of exhibiting increasing standards of life that was equated in their eyes with respectability and with breaking up from the past and from their “roots”. The symbolic separation between them and the Brazilia’s Roms was particularly underlined (more about this in the chapter “Local social relations”).

An official record of the year 1986 accounted the working situation of all the Roms from Nusfalau (Brazilia and Bakos) as following:

Total: 318 persons/74families/31households	
Seasonal workers and musicians	71
Agriculture (local): CAP; SMA; Socialist Farm	33
Qualified workers in industry	28
Under care of workers, housewives	184
Others	4

The record has, in my opinion, a limited reliability, due to the fact that it was made in September – before the time when all the Roms came back from the farms. The number of Roms is also not very trustfuly: they were already 313 in 1977!

However, it proves very clearly the fact that the Roms society was in the late socialism period strongly divided between those who had regular jobs and a better ranks and those who were tolerated in a status of semi-nomadism. Researching the locations of the Roms during time, I found that this work division has also a clear-cut geographical counterpart.

From the interviews: *“Those from Bakos moved there during the time of the elders [their parents]. They got jobs at the CAP and they built good houses. We, here, didn’t realize the importance at that time [for improving the houses]... we hadn’t enough mind for this...we didn’t have the conception...before we didn’t even make the groundwork of a house...The Roms of Bakos escape from this messiness because they lived with the Hungarians”* (K.G., 58, Brazilia)

3B. The Roms of Boghis

The Roms of Boghis belongs to a different traditional-professional branch: “zdrențarii” (tatter-dealers). 244 Roms live in this village in the Western part of it, along the county road. The village, like in the case of Nusfalau, is also a Hungarian majority rural community. At present the population structure is the following: 1208 Hungarians, 244 Roms and 81 Romanians. The habitation is clearly divided: 3/4 majority population, containing the majority’s households and the main institutions of the village (churches,

post, stores) and ¼ Gypsies' households, situated at a certain distance from the rest of the village.

What it is obvious in what concerns these Roms is the fact that they have preserved their genuine traditional life-style to nowadays. Their dressing manner for example is strictly guarded by precise rules, especially in the case of women. Their abilities for dealing very different stuff, depending on the economic environment, as well as their extended mobility are also good proofs for the perpetuation of a long-term customary life-strategy. Being poor and segregated during socialism they find an unexpected niche in the transition period for improving their economic status.

Historical-demographic perspective

We have very clear information about the Roma presence in the village beginning with 1850 (the documents that refers to previous times – especially the parochial records - have not explicit statements about ethnicity). As in the cases of many other Transylvania's villages Boghis was a multiethnic community. From the total of 910 inhabitants 832 were Hungarians, 60 were Romanians, 10 were Gypsies and 8 were Jews. What we can understand from the 1850 census is the fact that the Roma were considered to be "Hungarian Roma": reading the "religion" rubrics one can notice that all the Romanians were Greek-Catholics, while the Reformed community has with 10 members more than the Hungarian population. We can understand from this data that the 10 Roma were settled-down Roma and that – because of the religion affiliation – they were considered, at least for the authorities, an integrated "part" of the village (they were not "aliens"). In the same census I found that in the village were counted also 40 "strangers" (a very important number for a small village), who could have been also Roma, but from a different type (maybe nomadic or refugees from Romanians countries). Thirty years later, 33 inhabitants whom belong to "other nationalities" were counted in the village. 28 of them were regarded as speaking an "unknown mother-tongue" (probably Romani). While the number of Romanians was 72 and the Greek-Catholic believers were 81, it is very possible that some Roma were counted here because of their stronger relations at the time with the Romanian ethnic group (I assume that it is impossible for Hungarians or Jews to belong to the Greek-Catholic community). An interesting situation appears when we examine the census of the year 1900. We don't find here references to ethnicity but if we interpret the variable "religion" and "mother-tongue" we find that there is a big discordance between the number of the Romanians and their religion, on one side, and the Hungarian-speakers and their religions, on the other. 40 Romanians are counted, but 131 Greek-Catholic believers; and 1143 Hungarian-speakers, but only 1002 Reformed, 13 Catholics and 39 Israelites. Consequently, around 90 persons were counted as "Hungarian-speakers" but they were not also allocated to a related religion, while in the same time around 90 persons appeared as belonging to a religion which was practiced by a non-Hungarian-speaking population: they probably were Roma. This supposition is confirmed by the 1930 census, when 76 (Romani speaking) Roma were counted as Greek-Catholics. What it is to be observed for the XIXth century period is that in the condition in which other minority populations grown slow or even decreased (Romanians 1850: 60; 1880: 72; 1900: 40; Jews: 1850: 8; 1880: 21; 1900: 39) the Roma community tend to grow faster: 1850: 10; 1880: 28; 1900: aprox. 90.

During the WWII the Roms of Boghis like those of Nusfalau were subject to the “racial cleaning” plan of the pro-nazi Hungarian regime. They were forced to wear a banderole to mark their “race”. As elsewhere, their time to be deported was planned after the deportation of Jews. Nevertheless, while all the Jews were deported to Poland, the Gypsies escaped, due to the arrival of the Russian army.

From the interviews: “...*However, during the war was worse than today...before ‘44 we were planed to be deported...I was eleven at that time and I wore a banderole...we were all the Gypsies gathered in a garden in Boghis and we were surrounded by Hungarian and German soldiers...we were like in a camp...they have just finished with the last Jewish transport and our turn came when they had received a message about the coming of the Russians...etc*” (V.C., 67, Boghis)

An important number of Gypsy came in the village at the end of the 50’s from another region’s village: Huseni.

During socialism

The Roms who came in the village during socialism modified the perception of the Gypsies in the eyes of the villagers. First, they came from a Romanian majority village and consequently their second language is Romanian (I remind that Boghis is a Hungarian majority village; there is a difference if we compare them with the Roms from Nusfalau: the later have Hungarian as the second language. However, because they traveled a lot they speak also a satisfactory Romanian). Second, because of their strong traditional life-style they are considered “wilder” and “more dangerous” than the Nusfalau’s Roms and accordingly the peasants think (now as in the past) that it is not a good idea to make trouble with them. The communists thought in a similar way: they are too wild to try a short-term assimilation policy. They were moved in this village for two probable reasons: to change the ethnic balance of an increasing all-Hungarian village (the few Romanians were in a slow process of magyarization) and to divide the larger group of Roms of the Huseni township. Because of the above-mentioned perception (“wilderness” etc), the communists allowed the Roms to maintain, in a legal form, their habits. They were accorded a license for dealing the scrap materials (scrap metals, glass, different offals etc). These scraps were sold to special recycle state centers. The state license permitted the Roms to preserve their high mobility and was a good covering for different “parallel or underground economic activities” (Steven Sampson, 1994): they could travel around the region and provide and sell as mediators a wide range of non-important or scarce small products (vessels, feathers, hides, knives, baskets, brushes, small objects for agriculture, cigarettes etc). They were much poorer comparing with the majority and socially marginalized. No state program was addressed to them. They were not forced to employment in the agriculture or industry (very few exceptions are known). They were just tolerated as a remaining of the past which, when questioned, puzzled the authorities. The community as such was not enforced, but individually the Roms were the target of the police abuses. Their commerce enabled them to live at the bottom of society with no regular income, social aids or civil protection.

Very important and with great consequences for today are their preserved community independence and action autonomy. They traveled around the region with

their horse carts, stopping in fairs and markets or going in small groups from house to house asking for scrap or making exchanges. However, if compared with the seasonal Roms from Brazilia, they journeyed within a narrower area and stayed less off-house than the former. They had not a “second residence” like the Brazilians (the farms), and consequently they were much more concerned with the housing issues (even if poorer than the Brazilians at that time they had better houses; eg: when the village was electrified they succeeded to be connected). In the village life they were seen by the majority less as individuals and more like members of their community, a community that remained integrated and dominated by brotherhood ties and traditional Gypsy institutions (a leader: the “bulibasha”, a tribunal: the “kriss”, strong gender division) and which tended to respect mainly their own rules and to distrust the non-Roma world.

4. After 1989

4A. The Roms of Nusalau (Brazilia and Bakos)

The changing of the regime has displayed its consequences beginning with 1992. First and the most important, the Roms have not received land after the implementation of the law 18/1991 concerning the land re-privatization. According to the law one could receive land (in the limit of 10 Ha) if he or his forefathers used to hold land prior to 1949. As I mentioned before, they had never owned land. Another prescription of the law stipulates that one could receive land if was employed in the CAP (socialist farm) for minimum three years, “if there is enough land” at the disposal of the local redistribution commissions. The most disadvantaged were the Roms from Bakos who used to work as permanent employees in the local CAP (the collective farm); they were ignored by the redistribution authorities, their petitions being refused for “improper formulation”. But nobody give them the proper demanded application forms. They have not received the right of property not even for the land where their houses are built (Brazilia). The authorities treated them with open irony and disrespect:

From the interviews: *“When we asked land from the mayoralty the mayor told us: from whom have you inherited the land? From your mother? From your father? I’m not your father.”* (V.I., 47, Brazilia)

The Roms had not seen at that moment the detriment of this loss, because some other opportunities seemed to be open: at the time they think about an industry alternative or working abroad. But all the working alternatives vanished in the next three years: the Gypsies who worked, as commuters, in the extractive industry were the first dismissed; the local farm for cattle breeding was closed; the bricks factory was privatized (it was sold for a ridiculous small price: 200 millions lei – 10,000 USD) but soon collapsed and has opened never since. The socialist farms - IAS, another form than CAP, which was not put an end to after ’89 - where the Brazilians worked as seasonal employees narrowed their activity, so that after 1993 the Roms’ labor force was not needed any longer. Beginning with this year the economic situation of the Roms has worsened progressively. They find themselves in an economic environment in which the new property relations structure the social system in a way that places the Roms once again on the status of “serfs”. And, indeed, one who is foreign of the village is struck by the collective attitudes

of the majority population that are deployed in order to uphold the Roms in the position of a lower caste.

From personal fieldwork experience: At one point I asked a Rom (important as status within the Brazilia community) to take me in a visit to some Roms from Bakos. He agreed but he was very reluctant to enter in my car. He invented a lot of excuses in order to not come with me saying, lastly, that he wanted to go walking because he wanted to buy a bread on the road, and that we would meet after that on a certain street. I told him I needed also bread and it was a good occasion for me to buy some other things I needed. Finally we went together by car; during the road the peasants stared at us with stunned faces expressing a strong disapproval. At the shop the situation got worse: before entering I invited the Rom to enter before me, a gesture that was caught by the Hungarian seller who thereafter didn't respond to our greetings and refused - after telling us (in Romanian) that he had no bread - to speak with me in Romanian any longer.

This example is an expression of the way the Roms and those who are related with them are treated: they are allocated an isolated social place; they are not supposed to gather with the non-Roms. It is also an expression of envy (the Roms have received different kind of aids in the last years, and the peasants see these aids as gains obtained without effort and a way of encouraging the "lazy Gypsies" not to work). It also expresses a concern of the peasants for what they see as the danger of a possible well-being of the Roms in their village: if the Gypsies live well they will increase their number "even more". The Roms internalized this attitude of the majority during time, so that my companion didn't see something outrageous in the way he was treated.

Being deprived by their previous resources (salaries and in-nature payments) and landless the Roms turns once again toward their traditional craft. In the years '93 and '94 there was a certain demand for their bricks, especially in the near-by villages. They took advantage of the fact that the property of the land was not clearly settled, so they could exploit some territories in the surroundings of their habitat. Beginning with 1995 the process of land re-allocation was finished. The Roms were compelled in this situation to ask the local council for exploitation parcels from the communal property. In 1999 the council allocated them some places, but the Roms complained about the position of these parcels: they are situated on the upper hills, in places where there is no water source (which is needed in the fabrication process) and they also complained about not considering the fact that they have no transport facilities: in the whole community of Brazilia there is only one cart with a horse (and three bicycles). In these conditions the Roms continued to exploit (in the occasions when they find a demand) the land from within their housing area, transforming the district in a huge swamp. (In the present in many houses the floor is imbued with water after rains.)

The land privatization opened new opportunities on the market for the peasants. The quality of the land is good and when the socialist farm was broken they succeeded to appropriate many of the mechanized means for land cultivation. Some have started also small enterprises for cattle and poultry breeding. But these enterprises are not requiring yet a large working force. They are moreover household enterprises. Nevertheless, during the intense working days the needed hands for work grow. The Roms are employed in these situations, and poor as it is, this opportunity is seen, in addition to their sporadic bricks enterprise, as one of the few surviving strategies.

The system of employing the Roms is a complex one. Almost every Roms family has a Hungarian or Romanian patron family, in whose household they carry out domestic works that are needed at a certain moment: men clean the stables, help at the household's farm or give help in the forest; women wash the clothes or make clean around the house. The patron-client relation is in most of the cases built upon a primary event: the Roms family asks a Hungarian or Romanian couple to baptize their newborn child. If the asked family agrees, the relationship is made. The Roms consider this agreement as a proof of their respectability. The relationship is not a customary godfather-godson (or godson's family) relation: it has nothing emotional in it, but is more a symbolic exchange that express a guarantee of the protection provided by a family which belong to a upper class for one from a lower class. However, this relation is not as strong as the description may suggest. It can be knock down by a small misunderstanding or theft. And because the competition for finding more work is hard among the Roms, a Roms couple asks different families for accepting to baptize the following newborn children. From the other part the situation is also movable: if a trusted relation was not built with a certain Roms family, the majority family keeps at work those Gpsies who are considered to fit best its needs. The work based on this relation is not rewarded by money but only in kind, especially with food. Sometimes the patron family helps also the Roms with their personal relations in the "gadze world".

I would introduce here a small comment about this relation because it has some interesting consequences for the relations between the majority and the minority as separate wholes. Because many (almost all) majority inhabitants of the village have personal relations with one or more families of Roms (but not with larger groups; it is very probable they have never been in Brazilia) they tend to judge "their Gypsy" as being the "good Gypsy". But when they are asked about the Gypsy from Nusfalau in general – even if they know very well how hard the Roms employed by them work – they condemn the Gypsy for their "laziness", "dirtiness" (remember, their clothes are often washed by Roms women) and "theft" (in may 2000 there was no Rom imprisoned).

From the interviews: "*All these Gypsy are lazy. They hang out all the day long in the village, and not like normal people but in groups. They have a single aim: to make money for drinking. Instead of working they beg from door to door...etc*" When I asked if she employ Gypsy at work, she sad: "*I was lucky to find two very honest Gypsy to work for me*" (L. L., 36, secretary at the mayoralty)

As I mentioned above, the first way of employing the Roms is not rewarded by money. A second one functioned in the village. Early in the morning all the Roms who are able to work gathered in the center of the village and wait for a possible work to do for a Hungarian or Romanian "gazda" (owner). Because the Roms demand for work is very big and accordingly the concurrence is high, the peasant-employers pay very cheap for a working day. When the Roms are employed they receive maximum 50.000 lei/day (2.2 USD) and a meal.

From the interviews: "*We are more backward ...we are going to work for the Hungarians and doing a work that worth 100,000 lei. They give us a half...but we are going for however much we get; we can't chose...The Hungarian take advantage of the situation, because if I don't go someone else will go.*" (K.L., 24)

This situation is accepted with resignation. Due to the pressure of the historical discrimination of the majority the Roms accept their condition as a destiny prescribed for

their ethnic group. When asked if the education has a role for their well-being a Rom women said: “ *Yes...but you know, a Gypsy is always a Gypsy. However dressed, however educated the Gypsy is, there would always be a difference*” (K. L., 24).

According to them they may not hope to find employment for more than one or two days per week.

The Brazilia district is almost empty in the morning and starts to be repopulated at noontime, after the Roms finished their work at their patrons. They could be seen coming back with special vessels for food received from the “gazde”. The children beginning with the age of 8-9 years work also, if they don’t go to school any more.

Among other strategies to cope with the current situation I would mention the illegal commerce of a chemical substance (DTT), which is commonly used against crops’ vermin. The Roms women (followed by their children!) transport the stolen substance from the town of Turda (30 km from Cluj) to the cities Satu Mare and Carei (NW, near the border). It was not possible to find out how much they get for the transport, but I suppose that being only mediators they couldn’t receive too much. Women transport the substance because they produce fewer suspicions than men.

The only regular source of money is the children’s allowance. A family with eight children below the age of eighteen, for example, receives 730,000 lei/month (33 USD). The day when the allowance came is the day of debts payments, especially the payments of the food products bought from the single shop that accept the in-dept system for Roms (“Ali Laly”). According to their sayings is also the only day when it happens the family eats meat.

Seven people have pensions as ex-workers of the state farm. The pensions for the rural workers are the lowest in Romania - not more than 300,000 lei/month (13,5 USD). There is one disability pension for the handicapped person (400 000) and for the one who is taking care of him (300 000).

The members of the music band (nine persons) are invited to different *gadze* ceremonies (mainly at weddings) where they could get up to 200,000/person (10 USD).

Two couples without children have adopted one Rom baby each (is a mystery for me how they get the accept of the orphanage clerks for taking the babies in Brazilia’s environment). For taking care of them they get 800,000 lei/month (36,3 USD).

During summer the Roms could make some money by gathering the wild fruits from the near-by forests. When the time of the mushrooms come they organize en masse gathering campaigns (“we stay in the forest and wait for them to grow”, told me a Rom). For a week or so they eat only mushrooms, than they sell them to a Romanian from the village Bozies. At best they get 20,000 (1 USD) for one pail.

The main complain of the Roms concerning their situation after 1990 refers to the lack of jobs for them in the region. The recollection of the Ceausescu’s epoch is always a recall of a time when they knew how would manage in the next day and a time when they could rely on definite resources.

From the interviews: “*We had a lot of things to do in those times... If you want to work you get it. Now we stay and wait for something to come from the sky. We don’t want money for nothing. We want just to work as normal people do. Democracy has turned everything upside down. For Gypsies is worse than ever*” (I. L., 44, Bakos)

4B. The Roms of Boghis after 1989

The Roms of Boghis have taken a different route after the change of the system. The economic actions performed by them at a small scale before, 89 aggrandized and enriched their objects in the next period. Like the socialist nomenclature that became prosperous on the basis of its previous political capital and informal relations, the Roms of Boghis took advantage of their high mobility, of the good knowledge of the underground economy and of their ability to act very quickly on the unstable market of transition.

A good business that proved to be reliable for a longer term was the “walnuts affair”. The Roma who are involved in this activity are provided with industrial-made vessels by a patron (who is also Rom) and are sent in different rural areas. The vessels are offered to the Transylvanian’s peasants in exchange with walnuts. After collecting the walnuts they bring them home, crack them and give the kernels to the employer. The kernels are sold in Arad to an entrepreneur who processed them for export in Germany and Austria. By the time many of them preferred to run their own business with walnuts, so they gather the nuts with the occasion of different other sells and employed the poorest Roms from their community and from Brazilia to crack the nuts. A Rom from Brazilia could get 30.000 lei for cracking a pail (the obtained kernels are sold by the employer with around 200.000).

Another good business is the exploitation of the immobility of the peasants within the regional market. After 1989 the Roms succeeded to replace their carts with cars. They gain an important benefit by making use of the lack of information between the regular markets: they buy cattle and horses from one market and sell them back shortly in the market where the best price can be obtained. The horse dealing is especially important, involving a very similar selling technique with the one described by M. Stewart for Hungary (M. Stewart, 1997).

Having cars and good knowledge about the market they begin to buy also the vegetables of the peasants and transporting them in the city markets (this fact is very important for their relations with the majority: if compare with the Brazilian Roms, who have a clear lower status in the social structure of the Nusfalau village, the Roms from Boghis have business affairs with the peasants as between equal partners).

They play also in the rural context the role of the merchants who bring to the countryside, when come back from the cities, different object-gadgets (beginning with kitchen electronic tools and ending with children toys), of poor quality and small prices, the type of products with no clear brand name, which are produced in some undeveloped countries for people living in other undeveloped countries.

5. Family

The legal (civil) marriage is an almost disappeared practice in Brazilia after 1989. From the total of 32 interviewed couples only seven were legally married, six of them being married before ’89. Religious marriages are also rarely performed. (Nevertheless, those who recently converted to Pentecostalism would be constrained to do it.)

The fact that the concubinage is widespread does not mean that the marriage is not sometime performed. It does, but in “the gypsy way” - as they call it. They claim that

when the youngster “are liking each other” and decide to make a family, the boy’s kin is gathering, choose a “good speaker” among them and go to the girl’s house to ask her parents to agree with the marriage. The marriage is performed after short time, both pairs of parents paying for its organization. A tent (“shatra”) is built in the village and almost all the community is invited at the wedding party. A similar thing happens with the occasion of a newborn child’s baptism and, sometimes, with the occasion of a death (especially when an old and respected person dies). Nevertheless, at least in what concerns the marriages, this ceremony seems to be more and more uneven in the last years, because of the high costs and the lack of resources. The above description is more a recollection of the interviewed on how the marriage used to be in the good [socialist] times.

Even if the family remains a rather strong institution within the community, there are an increasing number of single mothers in the last years. The lack of the traditional ceremony is just a minor cause for this. The most important cause seems to come from the small chances of a couple to move in their own house or to follow the important rule that require for the bride to follow after marriage her husband in his parent’s house. Because of the overcrowded houses this rule was often broke, and while the situation of a men going to his wife’s house is not an honorable one, the splitting of the young families tends to grow faster and to take an irrevocable form. Women and children are left in the responsibility of the wife’s kin. (Many women experienced the situation of serial monogamy.)

[Example of a household structure: Household of B.G. Membership: two parents, three daughters and two sons. Two of the daughters are living there without husbands: one has three children, the other has four children. One of the sons lives there with his wife and two children. All the 17 are living in two rooms and the house’s garret.]

Following the healthcare registers and civil registers I found that the average age of reproduction in the last ten years is around 16 for women and 18 for men. A clear tendency of decreasing of the age of reproduction can be traced in the last three years. Eight children born by mothers below 16 were registered in this period, the inferior limit being a case of a 13 years old mother in 1999.

The average number of children/family is around 4,5. The number of the Roms children born after 1990 in Brazilia is 135. The reproduction cycle is very short. At 35 is very common for the Roms to be already grandparents.

Gender relations It is commonly accepted in the community that man is the head of the household. According to the male group, women have to obey in front of their husbands. It is a duty for the men to provide the well being of his family and to gain the resources for living. He has “to give money to his wife”, while she has the duty of managing the household consuming needs. The common perception is that the works within the household (taking care of children, cooking, housing, cleaning, house decoration, re-fixing) belong strictly to women [group]. Husband and wife are never going together at the food store to make the household shopping.

Man is responsible for what he and his family are doing in the outside world. He is in charge with managing the relations of his family with other families of the community, relations that are generally decided in the men’s world. It is accepted as common sense that man is doing the hard work. Leisure is a privilege of men, playing cards or rummy

and drinking in the pub being the most common entertainment. The society of men playing rummy, which I often observed, was never attended or kibitzed by women. When a group of men and women are walking together outside the community it is always divided by gender. Men are walking ahead, while women and children are coming after them, at a certain distance. (See also “Consumption”)

Relations between generations While the gender gap is quite important, the age could make a difference. Old women are especially respected and consulted in the extended family business. Children are treated more like adults beginning with the age of nine or ten, especially boys. Within the adult males group there is not an important difference of the man of, for example, 25 and the man of 40. Both are gaining their respectability by playing their abilities to make them remarked within the belonging male group or power group.

6. Education

A third of the inhabitants of Brazilia are illiterate; they are distributed in all the age groups. The causes for illiteracy are very diverse. During socialism – as I have explain above – many of them had not a permanent residence in the same place for the entire year. Children attended (when they did) different schools in different years and, as they recall, very often they were in the situation of changing the teaching language, depending on the majority population in the township where their parents worked (Romanian or Hungarian). Between 1965-1976 the local authorities opened a school only for Roms’ children inside the community. Both the Roms and the current principal of the village school remember it as a sad experiment. The Roms claims that the teachers made no efforts with their children while the principal says the children never came to the school if not forced. As the Roms recall the main improvement in education begun when their children went back to the mixed school. The best results were accomplished in the 80’s, when Roma children were mixed with majority children (especially for the case of Bakos).

The school abandon is very important after 1989. 27 pupils abandon school in 1999, from both the first and the second level (compared with 8 in 1992). Some have never been enrolled. In the condition in which the number of the Roma children grows three times in this period the number of the children who attend school is not very different from the 1986 situation.

Ethnicity	1986			1999		
	Level I-IV	V-VIII	Total	I-IV	V-VIII	Total
Hungarian	33,33% 135	37,78% 153	71,11% 288	35,41% 136	29,42% 113	64,84% 249
Roma	12,09 49	4,7% 19	16,79% 68	14,58 56	5,99 23	20,57 79
Romanian	4,41 18	7.68 31	12,09 49	7,29% 28	11,19% 43	18,49 71

			100%			100%
			405			384

As in the past, the proportion of children that follow the second level of elementary school is very small. Among the reason for school abandon, the principal of the school calls the lack of the proper language ability, the early marriage or pregnancy, the very early starts of the active working life, especially for boys, and the general lack of interest of the Roms parents for their children education. The Roms, at their turn, call mainly poverty reasons (lack of proper clothes and school supplies). They often complained me about the misbehavior of the teachers, who don't permit the children to go out during breaks. They said their children are ashamed to eat their break meals together with their Romanian/Hungarian mates. The all issue is about their bread: very often is not economically for Roma families to buy bread. Instead, they cook directly on the stove a kind of cake-bread, which is made daily from wheat flour and water. But even this food is sometimes lacking; and the Roma children (and their parents judge in the same way) prefer to stay at home instead of enduring the shame of longing for their colleagues' meals.

The distribution of the Roma children between the two different language-teaching classes (Romanian/Hungarian) is another issue. The school is one of the places where the difference in status between the Roms of Brazilia and those of Bakos is played. The Roms of Bakos, which – as I have shown – are historically better positioned than the Brazilians, enroll (or fight to enroll) their children in the Hungarian section. On the supposed reason of “balancing the number of pupils in classes” the Brazilian children are enrolled in the Romanian classes. In this condition, the children that belong from mixed Hungarian-Romanian families are enrolled only in the Hungarian section and some of the Romanian parents fight as well to enroll their children in this section - in order to avoid the mixing of their children with the Roma children. The segregation of the Roma children in school seems to be in its path, and is very likely that in three or four years the total segregation will be fulfilled. In 1999 there already was a class within the Romanian section where the Roma children from Brazilia formed the great majority: 16 Roma children, 2 Romanian children.

It seems to me that the segregation tentative in education follow a cyclic pattern: between 1967-1976 the all-Roma school functioned in the Roms district; between 1992-1994 there were four classes in the main school, within the Romanian section, only for Roma children (the classes were closed after a public scandal opened by the “Medicines Sans Frontieres”, who used to work in Brazilia at that time) and, under the majority pressure and in the conditions of the continuous impoverishment of the Roms, the total segregation would be probably once again set. The plan for building a new school only for Roms children is already on the agenda of the local council.

This segregation practice is very strong established in the case of the Roms from Boghis. In this case all the Roma children follows the school in Romanian classes, while almost all Romanian children learn in Hungarian. As we have seen, the Roms of Boghis have a different economic and social status than those of Nusfalau (Brazilia and Bakos). That is why the two sections have somehow the same weight in the school structure. This last example led us to the following conclusions:

- a. The ethnic distinction between Roma and non-Roma is much more stronger than the Hungarian-Romanian distinction.
- b. The segregation could be determined by ethnicity, but it tends to take a radical form when ethnicity is associated with poverty (the former separate school in Brazilia as the recent plans for a new Roma school speak about this).
- c. The previous experiments demonstrate that when the segregation is fulfilled the level of education of the Roms is decreasing much stronger, and the school abandon is growing, fact that maintains and reproduce the social gap between the majority and the Roma minority.

In respect with education, socialist period, like the previous times, was not one of great achievements for the Brazilia's Roms. Nevertheless, at least the Roms from Bakos had had a great chance. Many of them accomplished the elementary school and this fact enables them to achieve vocational education as well. This was a chance that is definitely lost in post-socialist time.

7. Housing

The most common house in Brazilia is the house built from unburned bricks, without buried foundation, plastered with clay and covered with tiles or chipboards. One or two rooms are disposed on the sides of a kitchen, which very often functioned as a hall in the same time. Beds occupy, as expected (75 houses for 542 inhabitants), the most of the house space. The only source of heating is the kitchen's stove (which is moved during summer in a provisional wood building outside the house). All the space, including the garret (in the summer) is used for sleep. No rooms have more than one small window. The floor is covered with boards, but the uncovered floors are not uncommon. Most of the walls have also the role of cupboards, different objects, especially clothes, being hanged on nails. The center of the house is the kitchen where, in general, the only table is situated. This is the "public" part of the house, where those people from the community who are in good relations with the members of the household, can enter during the day without many formalities. Nevertheless, in the less overcrowded families, and among those with a better status, one of the side rooms serves as the "center" – that is the room where the most valuable furniture and objects are exposed, and where the special guests are invited.

In Brazilia there are no kind of enclosed courtyards around the houses. The dwellings are lined-up along two alleys which end in a dirt-track, on one side, and in a swamp, on the other side. There are very few additional buildings around the houses. Because they have neither cattle nor land, buildings that in general exist around the households in the rural areas (stables, granaries) are lacking. Some pigsties still exist, but more like survivals of the better times (only two families manages to breed pigs in 1999). From the total of 75 households, only 17 are connected to the electric network. They were connected very late – in 1997 – with the full financial aid of a Roma association from Bucharest (*Romani Kriss*). Those who are legally connected allow the other to

“borrow” from them, using a complicate system of precarious (and illegal) installation that is deployed on the ground (in order to be very quickly picked when the electricity clerk is coming).

The Brazilia district is not connected at the sewerage, running water and telephone systems. The water source was a big problem all the time in the community, and a real threat for the health of its inhabitant. The major problem was and still is the infiltration of the polluted water of the swamps in the wells that are in use. (I remind that the swamps were formed on the old brick exploitations, which are spread all over the village). The same French organization (Medicines Sans Frontieres) made efforts to solve the water problem. In 1993 they paid the works of digging two new deeper wells. These are functioning today as the (more) reliable source of water for the community. They also paid for the works of paving the two alleys with stones.

In 1997 a unique experiment that tried to start a road for further improvement of the housing conditions was developed in Brazilia with the generous help of a Dutch foundation. Ten proper houses were built at the edge of the district. The experiment aimed to use the Roms skills as brick-makers for their direct profit. Those who wanted to participate in the experiment were invited to become members of a legal association (“The Roms of Brazilia”) whose management was shared by a mixed (Hung/Rom) couple from the village with the leader of the community and two of his henchmen. The goals of the association were diverse, but its short-term mission was to fulfill the ten houses building plan. In the next two years the Roms who joined the association prepared the bricks and helped the construction team at their work. All the additional materials as well as some basic furniture were provided by the Dutch foundation. The new houses structure respects the Roma living habits, having the same (two side rooms plus kitchen) structure, but they are larger, they are built from burned bricks and plastered with mortar. The rooms are at least two times larger in these houses than in their “traditional” equivalents.

Property. When comes to property issues there is not much to say for the case of Brazilians. With the exception of the personal goods and of the things and tools they gathered during time around the households they own almost nothing. As I have shown before, they have not received land during (re)-privatization. The land where their houses are situated is public property (it is owned by the village community and it is administrated by the local council). This land used to be a part of the local aristocrat domain. During socialism this land was used as a part of the socialist farm land-stock. After 1989 a part of it was allocated for ownership to the village peasants – to those who used to have land before collectivization, land which from different reasons could not be given back – while another part remains public domain.

The lack of land property is, among other factors, one of the reasons why the Brazilians didn’t improve their houses during socialism. (Among the “other factors” I would call a socialist law that forbade the construction of houses with less than two levels. This law was in use in the 80’s – exactly in the period of relatively prosperity of the Brazilians. They could afford at that time to buy small plots for construction in the village, and probably they could have built small houses there. Of course, the law was respected selectively: the non-Roma inhabitants built a lot of one-level-houses at the time. But the law was a good tool for the authorities to stop any attempt of the Roms to move in the village.)

There is an exception, in what concern the land property around the house, made by those who recently moved in the new-built houses. When the Dutch foundation negotiated with the local council the condition in which they would give their financial aid to the construction project they asked the council to sell them the land for construction. When the project was fulfilled, the foundation donated the land to the Roma community. So, the ten families who live here have somehow a different status. However, while they own the houses with legal paper, the land belongs to the Roma association.

In respect with housing conditions there is a big contrast between the Roms from Brazilia and those from Bakos. The later have proper houses, many of them built following the local Hungarian pattern. Every house has its “privacy”, having its own enclosed courtyard, well and annexed buildings. They are the legal owners of the houses and of the land around it, which very often include a small vegetable garden or even a larger plot.

8. Health situation

One of the most important losses of the Roms after 1989 is the health security that used to be provided by the socialist safety net. The archive from the health care unit shows very clearly the strong decreasing of the medical assistance for the Roms in the last years. Only twelve Roms were recorded as being consulted in the healthcare unit in 1999. The reasons are diverse. The most important is the dramatic change of the national health system, change that start three years ago. In short, the changes that decisively affect the Roms are the following: a. the removal of the subsidies for drugs (with the exception of the pregnant women and children) b. the requirement for enrolling on a “family general physician” list; when enrolls one should provide a proof of his earnings or unemployment benefits; c. one cannot consult a specialist without the generalist references; d. one cannot be hospitalized if has not a proof that he/she pays the healthcare taxes (which in general means that the person is employed, has unemployment benefits or is retired); if the person failed to prove this, he/she has to pay all the expenses of hospitalization

In these conditions the Roms have few alternative. One of them would be to go to private clinics, fact that –because of the costs - very rarely happens. Like in the larger society, the Roms remains out of the system. They could rely only on the malfunction of it, having the only chance of going to a doctor and hopping the door will be opened for them. The most frequent situation for them is to go to the emergency departments, where they could be treated momentarily. But when hospitalization is needed they have to pay for it, or the hospitalization is refused. During my stay in Brazilia in March 2000, a 62 men dyed of pneumonia after he was refused the hospitalization.

The desperate situation of Brazilia was to a certain extend relieved during the stay in the village of the French organization “Medicines Sans Frontieres” (1992-1995). After they live the community the poverty related diseases, especially tuberculosis, increased very strongly and became a concern for the village population at large. The Reformed Church in alliance with the Dutch foundation have decided in April, 2000 to pay for

hospitalization and drugs in the case of children and the persons over fifty. A program for reproduction and prenatal education was also at issue, but – with the exception of paying a high-school educated Roma woman from Bakos to do the job (together with a specialized nurse) – nothing have moved yet.

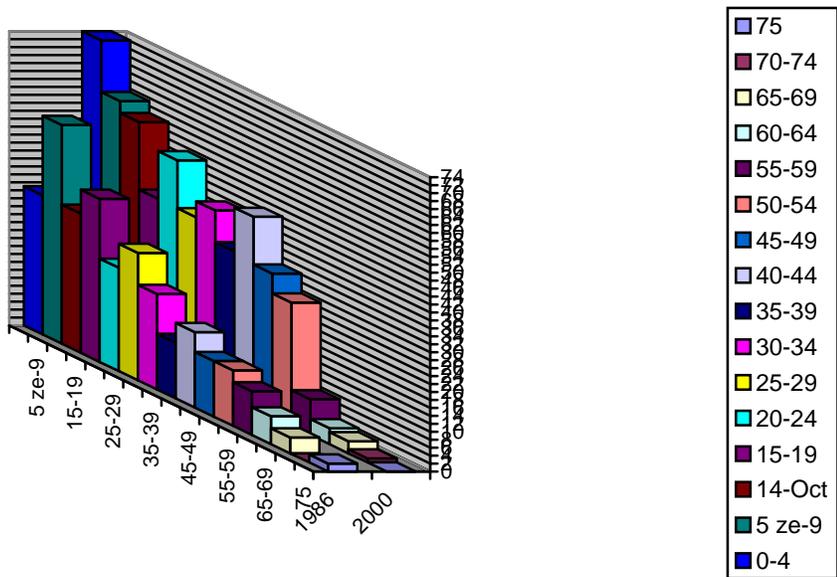
Among the most frequent diseases those related to poverty tend to predominate. Forty-two people are registered with chronic diseases (heart disorders, asthma, chronic hepatitis, chronic bronchitis, rheumatism, ulcer). Alcoholism seems to be one of the important causes for the big rate of these diseases. Children suffer mainly of dystrophy, ricketiness, chronic anemia, digestion illnesses, chronic bronchitis. In 1994 an epidemics of viral hepatitis was reported among children. In 1999 seventy people were suspected of tuberculosis and, after investigation, twenty-two were found ill (eighteen of them are children). Dental problems represent the overwhelming harm in the community.

While infant mortality is not (yet?) an indicator of the health deterioration (for children below three died in the last ten years), the life expectancy decreased. A comparison of the age distribution in 1986 and 2000 could be relevant:

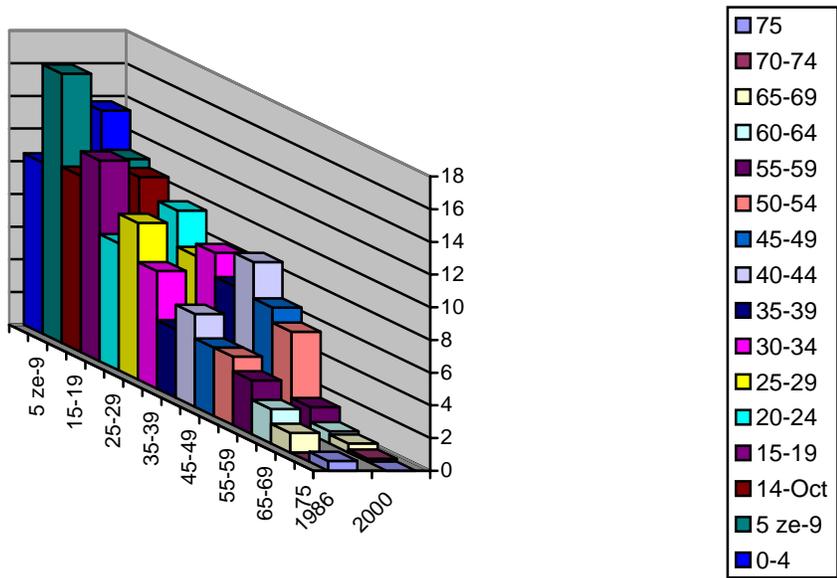
Age distribution: 1986; 2000

Years	1986			2000		
Age groups	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
+75	2	0	2	0	0	0
70-74	0	0	0	1	0	1
65-69	4	1	3	3	0	3
60-64	7	4	3	4	1	3
55-59	11	4	7	9	2	7
50-54	14	5	9	31	17	14
45-49	14	8	6	36	20	16
40-44	19	10	9	48	23	25
35-39	14	10	4	37	21	16
30-34	24	15	9	45	21	24
25-29	32	17	15	41	23	18
20-24	26	16	10	53	26	27
15-19	41	21	20	41	18	23
10-14	36	21	15	58	26	32
5-9	55	26	29	61	32	42
0-4	35	14	21	74	34	27
Total	334	172	162	542	264	278

Increasing of birth rates



Decreasing of life expectancy



We can see from this data that while the total population almost doubled, the population over fifty-five is almost the same or even smaller. Men seem to be more affected by the general deterioration of life than women.

We may see also from this table (fact that is confirmed by the interviews) the important number of people who came back in the village after 1990: the number of the persons between 20-40 in 1986 is much smaller than the corresponding number in 2000 (the groups between 35-54). They are especially those who used to have law paid jobs in the industrial cities and who were the first laid-off after the change of the system.

9. Incomes, consumption and expenditures

Being highly irregular, to establish precisely the incomes of the Roms of Brazilia is a difficult task. The income varies with respect of age, skills, strength, relations in the village, seasons, etc.

There are very few regular incomes. Among them the most important is the children allowance which is 65 000 lei for the first two children and 100.000 lei for all the others. For example, a family with five children below eighteen is receiving 430 000 lei (aprox. 19 USD). Seven people have pensions (around 300 000) as ex-workers of the state farm.

Instead of trying to find an impossible average income I have put together in a comprehensive list all the works that are paid in money. This list is completed with the list of the works that are paid in kind. Finally, I compare in some examples the consume that comes out from the debts shop list and from the data that was obtained from the interviews with the declared works and income.

A. Works that are paid in money:

1. Making and selling bricks when a clear demand exists (an extended family or a group of workers – 10-15 persons – work 2 weeks for 6000 bricks. A brick is sold with around 1200 lei. In ideal condition – good weather, proper clay, receiving the money when the command is ready- and after the subtraction of the cost of the coal – a Rom could get at the end 350 000 – 450 000 lei. (seasons: summer- early autumn)
2. Day-labor in agriculture: 40 000 lei plus meals (spring, summer, autumn)
3. Day-work in construction: 60 000 lei plus meals (late spring, summer, autumn)
4. Day-work at the forest: 50 000 lei (summer, autumn)
5. Trading chemical substance against vermin (illegally): 300 000-400 000/transport (approximate values) (winter, spring)
6. Gathering mushrooms and wild-fruits: 30 000–40 000 lei/day (summer, autumn)
7. Processing wall-nuts for the Boghis' Roms – 30 000-40 000 lei/day (winter)
8. Taking care of old persons (women work): 300 000 lei/month

B. Works that are paid in kind, especially with food:

1. Cleaning and washing (women work)
2. Working in the stables and doing a wide range of small jobs around the majority's households

The works in agriculture could be paid in nature as well, with a quantity of cereals or vegetables.

While there is only one shop that consent to sell products to the Roms by debt, and because they are shopping almost everything from there, I assume that the list of the debts gives a very good picture of their expenditures.

Before going further with the expenditures accounts, I would make some remarks about this shop. The shop (Aly Lavy SRL) is own by a Romanian and is a family affair. It is located in the proximity of Brazilia on a street corner and makes its profits largely from the commerce with the Brazilians. In the village it is known as a Gypsy place and, indeed, is the locus where the Roms spend quite a lot of time. It is formed by two large rooms and an open courtyard. The first room is the grocery proper, while the second functioned as a pub. The pub room is mainly a men place, and after noon is generally very crowded (The Roms are not served in other pubs from the village. They could buy alcohol or cigarettes from different other pubs, but in the last three years they are asked very straight to buy and go out.) In order to enter the pub one has to pass through the grocery. Alcohol is also sold by debt. When a Rom wants to enter the pub he is checked on the debt list and, if still creditable, he received a small piece of paper with the written command for the barman. Women go to the grocery mainly in the morning, and spend a while chatting inside or in the courtyard. In great majority the Roms are paying the debts in time. The large parts of them are paid when the children allowance comes. In the case of failing to pay in time, a family is still credited one week.

Examples (March 2000):

Case 1. Household V. I. (9 members)

Members: grandmother (48), father (32), mother (30), six children (11, 8, 7, 5, 3, 1)

April 2000

Consumption	Expenditures (lei)	Works/Incomes declared
Potatoes	38 000	Children allowance = 530 000 4 Days-work in Agriculture = 160 000
Flour	42 500	
Sugar	10 000	
Beans	33 000	
Meat	37 000	
Salami	32 000	
Pasta	38 000	
Margarine	25 000	
Milk	40 000	
Cheese	16 000	
Bread	126 000	
Soap and detergents	16 000	

Cigarettes	77 000	
Alcohol	99 000	
Electricity	80 000	
Total	709 000 (30,8 USD)	690 000 (30 USD)

Case 2. Household K. G. (7 members)

Members: husband (28), wife (24), husband's brother (22), four children (7, 5, 4, 2)

Consumption	Expenditures (lei)	Works/Incomes declared
Potatoes	23 000	Children allowance = 330 000 4 Days-work in agriculture = 160 000 2 Days-work in Construction = 120 000
Flour	35 500	
Sugar	7 000	
Beans	22 000	
Meat	26 000	
Salami	31 000	
Pasta	27 000	
Margarine	30 000	
Bread	210 000	
Milk	34 000	
Cheese	19 000	
School supplies	15 000	
Cigarettes	66 000	
Alcohol	82 000	
Electricity	-	
Total	627 000 (27 USD)	

Case 3. Household L. V. (11 members)

Members: grandmother (44), grandfather (48), first son (26) his wife (23) and tree children (5, 3, 2), second son (20), daughter (24) with two children (7, 5)

Consumption	Expenditures (lei)	Works/Incomes declared
Potatoes	60 000	Children allowance = 360 000 Retirement pension = 280 000 8 Days-work in agriculture= 330 000 Playing music = 120 000
Corn Flour	33 000	
Wheat Flour	56 000	
Beans	60 000	
Meat	40 000	
Salami	110 000	
Pasta	55 000	
Margarine	65 000	
Bread	105 000	

Drugs	60 000	
Sweets	7 000	
Cheese	65 000	
Milk	90 000	
Children Shoes	140 000	
Cigarettes	164 000	
Alcohol	75 000	
Others	23 500	
Electricity	72 000	
Total	1 280 000 (55,5 USD)	1 090 000 (47 USD)

Note: In 1999 the income per capita in Romania was 700 000 (26 USD). In January 2000 the average income was 2 100 000 (95 USD)

The average of expenses that comes out from the total of the 16 investigated households is 792 000, while the average declared incomes is 619 000. Nevertheless, the most important part of the consumed food is obtained by in-kind payments, while the consumption of cigarettes and alcohol is much more important than what we can find in the debt-list. Participant observation revealed that usually after work the first place where men go is the pub.

With the exception of the shoes, the problem of securing clothes was relieved for the time by the same Dutch foundation, which beginning with 1998, in cooperation with the Hungarian Reformed Church (who organize the distribution), provide the community with second-hand clothes from the Netherlands.

A good finding of the expenditure/income comparison, which is confirmed by the interviews, is the important weight of the children allowance in the total of the declared incomes. The allowance covers the expenditures of a household in a range that varies from 1/3 to 1/2 of the total expenditures, fact that proves the expected hypothesis that reproduction is here a strategy for cope with extreme poverty.

If men are the most “costly” members of the household (but this not imply that women are not drinking and smoking; however, the proportion of men related to these consumptions are much more important) children are the second recipients of the incomes. When the food is scarce, the first who are fed are children. With few exceptions, women seem to be the most disadvantaged members of the households.

However poor they are, when a family falls in a desperate situation, when children have nothing to eat for days, the community finds momentarily solutions. Food is provided and even money is borrowed. A good example of the community’s solidarity is expressed in a very peculiar case: a single-mother with two children was convicted in 1997 for a small theft (7 kilo of corn and 3 of vegetables) to one and a half year in prison. In order to avoid execution, she give birth in the next years to two other children (with fortuitous men). The community is entirely helping her to manage with the children, being a total agreement in the neighborhood about the injustice she is a victim of. (A Roma organization has put her case in the attention of the Supreme Court)

Within the extended (nonresident) family, but not only, children from other household who happens to be in the house at the mealtime are feed together with the

residents. In the case that an unexpected visit occurred when the family is taken lunch, the visitor is always invited to share their meal (to refuse is quite impolite).

10. Local social relations

Leaders:

We have an important difference in what concern the leadership in the researched Roms communities. The community of Boghis has one strong leader (or “bulibasha”) who is recognized by all the Roms, a leader who is rich enough to deploy symbols of power and prestige (in this case a three flat house, newly built and with special metal decoration of the roof, three cars – an (old) Mercedes among them – jewelry, of his and his family etc). He has strong relation with the important persons from the majority population and with the authorities. Together with other rich members of the community he rules over a kind of court, which judge the internal disputes. He gives jobs to the community’s poor and asks obedience instead. He especially exhibits his status with the occasion of different ceremonies like weddings or newborn baptism, offering expensive gifts or paying part of the party costs. This community is hierarchically organized, apparently having a large variety of statuses and economic situations. In short, it is an integrated community, which in post-socialism has reinforced its (never-lost) tradition.

We have a different situation in the case of Nusfalau’s Roms (Brazilia plus Boghis). The “leader” of Brazilia, if compared with the Boghis community’s leader, is more a counterfeit leader, produced mostly by the fact that the non-Roms ask the Roms, when they want to deal with the community, about their leader. So, they decide from time to time, more or less publicly, who would be the leader. But there is not a general consent about him. During time he could acquire a certain authority, but this authority is not enough strong to bring together all the factions. He has neither the richness nor the moral authority to obtain a status similar to the “bulibasha’s” status. More important, it seems to me that he gains his authority less from community’s ethos and more from the non-Roma society. The ex-leader (Ion Ciorba, 66, 7 years of education) used to work during socialism at the local town hall. He was, and still is, the leader of the community’s music band. The community saw him through his jobs, the fact that he had at the time a stabile job “at the center” being very significant in the Roms’ assessment. But – and this fact tells us a lot about the relation of the Brazilians with the majority - his job was in fact one of a good-for-everything person. He was cleaning man as well as waiter, bus boy and courier. However, he is a very good musician, and his craft allowed him to make good money for the socialist times. He was than both richer and socially better situated than the average Brazilian. He was “the leader” from another reason as well: he had a certain status and in plus he was stabile. Others of his condition were commuters, seasonal workers or have not prestige at all. Among other (hilarious) reasons that were invoked at his replacement in 1990 was his alleged “communism” (but hilarious or not this label is a proof that his authority used to come largely from the non-Roma world). Many other leaders succeeded him in the post-socialist years, everyone with his small party and interests. Because I know him best due to his help during fieldwork I would make in the following the profile of the present leader, Victor Kallay (38, 8 years of education). His

leadership role receives also its legitimacy largely from the outside world. Being a man of initiative he proved to be a good organizer during the period when the French medical organization activated in the community. Because of his reliability, both the Dutch foundation and the Roma foundation from Bucharest had chosen him as leader when they started the improvement houses project (see “Housing”). Shortly before this he succeeded to obtain a very good brick command from a near-by village private farm, and he organized a large work site, involving 27 families in this work. That was also the time when the agreement for selling by debt with the Aly Lavy patron was realized. He successfully convinced the shop-owner that they could and would pay when the command would be completed. Nevertheless, if different “benefactors” seem to trust him, they don’t trust his entirely. Every donation requires some legal forms, so a legal framework had to be organized. They decided for a non-profit association, which was named “The Roms of Brazilia” (but not all the Roms agreed to enroll as members). Victor became its president, but the sponsors put the condition that a person from the village, namely one who used to be at the time local counselor at the town hall (a Romanian), to be the vice-president. Consequently, Victor Kallay is in respect with many decisions asked only to sign the documents, but he is not really trusted that he could understand the “legal complications”. So, acting in this way the sponsors go along with the general trend in the village to see the Roms as “backwards” (if not primitive) and incapable to look alone after their public or community’s interests. Moreover, while they had a role in his gain of the leadership - by putting his decisions under the scrutiny of a non-Roma - they undermined his authority and prestige. The result is that whenever something is going wrong some Roms accuse Victor of being nothing but the counselor’s marionette. Trying to find a way out of this situation Victor decided to run for a place in the local council in the spring 2000 elections. But he failed due to the fact that another Rom (an ex-leader) run also, but for a different party (Victor run for “Romanian Roms’ Party” while Varga Ilie run for “Roms Democrat Party”). The Roma electors from Brazilia were divided after the two candidates and, consequently, they lost the representation in the local administration, a representation that could have been easily obtained if they have been united.

The Roms from Bakos district don’t recognize Victor as a leader and they don’t have a leader as such.

Relations between the communities

If the social distance between the Roms in general and the majority population of the village was, I think, already clarified in almost all the chapters of this paper, the borders between the Roma communities are not yet very clear.

The Roms of Bakos – due to their general elevation during socialism – are trying desperately to make a difference between them and the Brazilians. While they are losing as well their opportunities for making a decent live, they tried in the last year not to compete with the Brazilians on the under-skilled and underpaid jobs provided by the majority. Some tried a “third way” between the Boghis’ Roms and Brazilia’s Roms: working abroad. Eight men succeeded to do it, six in Hungary and two in Germany, for periods that varied from four months to two years. Others went to work as unskilled workers in road constructions and for two years many of them worked in southern

Romania digging grooves for the telephone company. When asked about the differences between them and Brazilians the only answer they have is related to their different work-status during socialism. [*“We are hard-workers, you know, ...we had proper jobs...we have real houses, with TV, fridge, and what a house suppose to have. We have all these because we worked hard in Ceausescu’s times... Democracy has bring nothing to the Roms.”* L.G., 54] The relationship between them and the Brazilians is two-edged. They are visiting each other on major occasions, and agree that they are of the same kin, but the Bakos’ Roms prefer not to be seen together with a Brazilian in the village. In addition, the formers see themselves as being more “civilized” than the later.

It is very interesting that when the Brazilians were asked to define themselves in comparison with the Boghis’ Roms the same term was used. They think about themselves that they are indeed very poor but at least they are civilized. They are dressing like “the normal people” and don’t make dubious businesses. An informant recall [as an example of “uncivilized” behavior] that when he invited a Rom from Boghis to his daughter’s wedding that person came not only with his family but also with “a half of the community”.

The Roms of Boghis regard the Brazilians with contempt. Being the only group who are proud of their ethnicity, they don’t see the Brazilians as “real Roms”. Moreover, in their understanding to employ another group to work for you and be paid (as is the case with the walnut processing) has not only an economic significance, but also an important cultural meaning: it shows a kind of caste difference, a clear subordination of one who is somehow similar to you (the same language) but who has no means to acquire respectability, power or prestige.

Conclusions and explanations

In order to explain the founded facts two types of explanations – which are cumulative, not exclusive – could be involved: a. historical-structural; b. ethnic-cultural

a. Historical - structural

- The Roms of Brazilia used to be serfs of the local aristocrat until very late (the beginning of the XXth century). The collective memory of the village might preserve this former status of the Roms
- Due to the economic boom of the village at the beginning of this century the Roms found opportunities in local industry and agriculture. Having neither land nor capital (as other minority ethnic groups, like Romanians and Jews) they were proletarianized; they were employed as unskilled workers in the local industry and agriculture; they also provided domestic works for the majority for in-kind payments
- While during socialism the range of economic opportunities for the Brazilians expanded, they remained low-skilled workers. Socialism was a period when they had an easier access to resources, but was not a time of social upgrading.
- The ethnic borders between majority and Roma minority remained very strong during time. Only two mixed marriages (Roma – non Roma) are reported in the village (during socialism).

- The history of the Boghis Roms is different; the most of them came in the village during socialism. In no moment in time they were strictly dependant on the village majority population, and this could explain their present economic autonomy

b. Ethnic and cultural

Comparing the two Roms groups in what concerns their assessment of ethnicity I found important differences. For the Boghis Roms there exist a definite pride of being a Rom, of have the independence (imagined) in relations with the non-Roms. They are not longing after the non-Roms way of living. This does not imply that they are really independent. On the contrary: their present well-being is entirely dependent on the exploitation of their relations with the majority. But while they are speculating the opportunities from the outside world, the gains are interpreted in a system of values and beliefs that strongly opposed them to the village's peasant population. I would borrow here, in order to explain the reproduction of this difference, some of M. Stewart opposed categories applied by him on the case of Harangos Roms (M. Stewart, 1997). Among the differences the following appear to me as being highly involved. While for the peasants the land property is an important value, the Roms are not considering it as such. They were not interested in the socialist time also to work in the socialist farm in order to obtain some plots for their personal use (as the Bakos' Roms did). Now they have enough money to buy land, but they prefer to let the peasants to make the hard work, while they buy their products and sell them in the town market. Accordingly, the hard work is also not valued – on the contrary. A Rom is proud when he obtains the final goal of work with the fewest efforts. Dealing, as opposed to producing, is another difference. They are always on the road, speculating the difference in prices between different markets. Their target is the best deal, not the best product. This opposed system of values in respect with work and property is doubled by strong social rules and taboos inside the community, which makes stronger the Roma - non-Roma difference. By the time they became richer they neither mimic the non-Roma consuming practices nor they significantly alter their internal rules. The dressing style of the Roma women, for example, is not changing. They don't follow an external fashion. Quite the opposite is true: they invest money in expensive Gypsy-style clothes and jewelries. The new Roma houses don't try to copy the non-Roma villas, but when possible they speculate with the imagination of small-scale fastidious palaces.

The Roms of Brazilia and Bakos instead, have lost their self-esteem in regard with their ethnic group. They understand their ethnicity more like a kind of fate punishment, a situation they would happily change if possible. They are longing after the non-Roma values: they would like to posses land and - thinking on how the Boghis Roms are defining themselves – they praised the hard work. One could argue that they are a totally different group than the Roms of Boghis. However, some survivals – the washing taboos, the gender gap, the dialect they are spoken – make me to strongly believe that they are not more than a group that endure a long-time assimilation. Due to their long history of integration on the non-Roma periphery they internalized the non-Roma view about themselves. “However educated, a Rom is just a Rom” an informant told me. “There are

no jobs for the Hungarians now, than how could they be for the Roms?” said other, assuming that is “natural” for the Roms to follow on the social ladder after the non-Roms. A Roma woman told me that she heard she was gossiped (by non-Roma women) - with the occasion of church attendance - that “she put too much perfume on her”. “But I’m doing it just because they believe about us that we stink”.

They live the roles that are imposed on them from the outside, and by doing this they continuously reinforce these roles.

Archival sources

Parochial Registers

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- Reformed parochial register: births, deaths: 1791-1808 (Latin, Hungarian) - location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
- Reformed parochial register: marriages: 1842-1870 (Hungarian) - location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
- Reformed parochial register: deaths: 1809-1849 (Hungarian) - location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
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- Reformed parochial register: births: 1834-1863 (Hungarian) – location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
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- Reformed parochial register: deaths: 1873-1895 (Hungarian) - location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
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- Greek-Catholic parochial register: births, marriages, deaths: 1828-1858 (Cyrillic, Romanian) – location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
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- Greek-Catholic parochial register: marriages: 1887- 1940 (Romanian) – location: Arhiva de Stat, Zalau
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- **Land property registers**– location: Mayoralty of Nusfalau
- **School records** - for the period 1954-today – location: school archive of Boghis
- **Health records: population register, chronic ill, new-born children, individual cards** from 1955 to present – location: health unit of Nusfalau
- **Different tax registers from the middle of XIX century to the present** - location: Mayoralty of Nusfalau

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